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ABSTRACT

Forty-four mildly handicapped students (grades 4 through 9) in resource rooms were interviewed about their understanding of the special education referral and placement process, their explanation of the reasons for their placement, interpersonal problems produced by placement, strategies to handle the interpersonal problems, predictions about future special educational needs, enthusiasm about resource activities and teachers, and thoughts about the personal usefulness of the program. Among findings were that Ss attributed learning or behavioral deficits to themselves when asked why they were in resource programs; the majority exhibited confusion and inaccurate understanding of their reasons for placement and the actual placement process; strategies developed to cope with interpersonal problems included ignoring taunts, asking help from peers or teachers, and keeping their school program a secret from peers; and students rated their resource programs very favorably, with an overall positive ability for them as evidenced by their perceived growth in specific skill areas and general self concept. (CL)

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Resource Programs: Through the Eyes of the Student

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Resource Programs: Through the Eyes of the Student

Prior to the 1970's, children with mild learning or behavioral problems were usually handled by public schools in one of three ways: 1) they were excluded from participation through expulsion or continuous suspension;[9] 2) they remained in regular classrooms while having their special learning needs ignored,[25] or 3) they were segregated in either separate classrooms or schools with other handicapped students.[22] The preferred option--special class placement--came to be criticized for several reasons. "Efficacy studies" were inconclusive in portraying segregated settings as preferable to regular class settings.[19,22,24] Other observers criticized the inability of the special class model to adequately serve the growing number of identified special needs students[1,14,16] and the associated high costs of separate programs.[12] Finally, segregated settings were criticized for the stigmatization and lowering of self-concepts which frequently affected their participants.[10,16,17,18]

Special education service delivery systems changed dramatically during the 1970's--particularly with the passage of the of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142) and its mandate for service in the "least restrictive" setting. Approximately 70% of all handicapped students--including 45% of those labeled "emotionally disturbed" and 78% of those labeled "learning disabled"--are now served in either their regular classroom with supplementary instruction or in part-time resource programs.[26*]

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*The resource room is a teaching arrangement in which individuals or small groups of students (usually not more than

This study looked at the impact of resource room placement on 44 students. It assessed how the goals of resource programming actually impinge on the student's day-to-day involvement in the setting. How do they make sense of the program goals--both to themselves and to others? Do they feel the programs are worthwhile? Do they enjoy the programs? And does their self-concept change or remain the same as a result of their placement?

The study utilized the phenomenological perspective of students rather than relying upon educator's evaluations of resource room impact. It did not check various "realities"--of resource students, of typical students, of teachers, of administrators--against one another for verification of "objective reality." It assumed the symbolic interactionist perspective[3] that social reality differs from person to person and from group to group. A student is, therefore, seen as acting on the basis of what his or her own interpretation of events in the setting mean. The individual student's perspective is additionally tempered by the shared perspective[4] that the larger group of resource students--to which he or she belongs--has towards resource programming. For this reason, it was important to ask students how they interpret their environment rather than attempting to infer their understanding through professional's possibly differing perspectives. To paraphrase Bogdan[6] on his research with people labeled mentally retarded, "[I] treated my subjects as experts on what

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five) are provided special assistance in academic and/or social-emotional skill areas for not more than one-half of their school day by a certified special education teacher.

it is like to be labeled [resource students. I] treated them as intelligent people who have insight about their condition, where they have been, and what their world is like."

Method

Forty-four students from six resource programs in two New York State school districts were interviewed using qualitative research procedures.[3,4,5] The interviews were conducted from March to November of 1981. The students were labeled "emotionally disturbed," "learning disabled," or "neurologically impaired" and in the fourth through ninth grades (see Table 1). These labeled groups constitute the vast majority of mildly handicapped students served in resource programs. This range of labeled students was interviewed because of the similarities attributed to them by educators. Teachers are often unable to distinguish the etiology and manifestations of one group's learning problems from another group's problems.[7,15,21] Furthermore, distinctions made between the mildly handicapping categories are inconsistent and often reflect the training bias of the particular educator describing the child.[2] One cooperating school district viewed "neurological impairment" as a subcategory of "learning disabilities," while the other district considered it a distinct category of exceptionality. Within the classrooms, teachers responded to differently labeled children with remarkably similar teaching strategies. It had also been suggested by teachers during preliminary research--and later confirmed by interviewed students--that non-resource peers viewed resource students similarly regardless of the particular student's label--that is, as a "retard" or as being "slow." The use of the three groups, then,

provided a fuller, more realistic perspective of how mildly handicapped students experience the resource model.

Table 1--Interviews by sex, grade, race, and label (N-44)

Sex:	males	31
	females	13
Grade:	fourth	1
	fifth	2
	sixth	6
	seventh	20
	eighth	5
	ninth	10
Race:	black	9
	white	35
Label:	emotionally disturbed	9
	learning disabled	25
	neurologically impaired	7
	emotionally disturbed/learning disabled	1
	emotionally disturbed/educable mentally retarded	1
	learning disabled/speech impaired	1

The interviews were voluntary with approximately one-half the students in the six programs choosing to be interviewed. Each unstructured interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and had its own dynamic which controlled the pace and specificity of questions. Particular themes[4,5]--that is, frequently mentioned ways in which students thought about resource

programming--emerged from the interviews. Eight themes appeared in varying form through most interviews. They were: student's understanding of the special education referral and placement process; their explanation of the reasons behind their placement to themselves, peers, and parents; interpersonal problems (ie. negative labeling) encountered because of the placement; strategies developed to handle the interpersonal problems; predictions about future special educational needs; enthusiasum (or lack of) about resource activities and teachers; and thoughts about the personal utility of the program. Several areas highlighting mental health needs of resource students will now be addressed.

Findings

A) Interpretations of the Placement Process. Students showed their understanding of the reasons and mechanisms by which they were placed into resource programs by addressing three areas of discussion: 1) their understanding of the specific reasons for their placement; 2) their understanding of the specific placement mechanisms; and 3) their understanding of who constitutes the placement decision-makers.

Thirty-eight of the 44 students gave the reasons for their placement in terms of things specific to themselves (ie. "I have a problem in reading."). Another 14 (some provided more than one response) explained why students were generally placed in resource programs with the implication being that the general reason applied to the particular student.

The majority of the 38 students cited academic-related needs as the primary placement reason (see Table 2). Some students provided precise--though not necessarily accurate--accounts

and labels in describing the placement reasons. For example, seventh-grader Nanette and eighth-grader Desmond said the following:

> "I had dyslexia. I don't really understand how it happened to me. But like one day, I was going by this stop sign and I started to read and it was 'pots' and I didn't know why anyone would put that word on a sign. Someone told me after that it said 'stop.' And I was doing that all the time."
>
> .....
>
> "I have a reading disability. That's why I come [to resource]. ...When I read, I don't understand things as fast as the other kids in my regular room. I get mad or frustrated with myself when that happens....It's like I don't read as smoothly as others. They read nice and smooth. But my reading isn't smooth. That's my problem."

Table 2--Perceived reasons for placement (N-31)

Academic reasons	28
Behavioral reasons	3
Academic/behavioral reaons	5
Other reasons	2

Other students were definitive about the problems without using specific labels. Kristin said, "It's like I have problems with spelling things. I look at a work and can't spell it and it screws up the whole thing." Other representative reasons given for placement were: "difficulty remembering," "I don't hear very good with my right ear," "I didn't say things the

the right way," and "I don't talk right. I have problems talking. Some people don't understand what I say. I guess that's why I come to resource." While most academic reasons are language arts-oriented, six students cited mathematics: "math wasn't my best subject, you might say." Six others cited general academic problems--in reading, math, and learning skills in general--as the basis for their placement. Robert, for example, said he has "trouble with things [he is] supposed to learn."

Another group of students provided social-emotional reasons. "They think that I shouldn't be quiet. But I don't like to be rowdy like the other kids. I sort of like to watch things and think about things with myself. They are always trying to get me to talk and say things and be louder."

.....

"Sometimes I just get real angry and can't control things. There is damage sometimes. When I was little, I used to set fires. That's what they say--I was a pyro....I don't do that sort of stuff now. But I do get angry and the [group] home [where I live] just makes it worse."

The second type of response--general parameters for resource placement which by implication are applied to the specific student--covered the same range of behaviors as the first type. Some reasons were academic: "Well, like if you don't learn like the other kids, you're stupider," "[My friends are in resource because] I guess they were dumb, too," and "But not everyone comes here. Just if you are slow on something--then you come here." Ninth-grader Willy said, "[Students are enrolled] if you can't control yourself or you get in fights very often....Most of us have problems in behavior." Asked

what she thought about her work in the resource room, Marie said, "It's boring. It's always boring. Dumb kids do boring work." I said, "Why do you say 'dumb'?" She responded, "Look, who's in the room with me? They ain't the smart ones!...Kids with problems.. If you're slow, you go."

The majority of students perceive a logical basis for their being placed in a resource program. They are in resource to "work on problems" or perceived deficits within themselves. (Only one student rejected this deficit notion.) The interviews highlighted differing levels of sophistication--some students saying they are "slower" or "stupider" than non-resource peers, while others precisely define the parameters of their special learning needs (ie. "I had dyslexia.")

In addition to addressing the "why" of their placements, students talked about the "how" of placement. They referred to specific tests, interviews with psychologists, or interchanges with other adults which they believe to be the specific catalysts instigating placement. The confusion and lack of precision by which students explain their own placement is extensive. Even those students who answered with specific incidents or versions of their placement appear to understand only small parts of the actual placement process used by their school districts.

Forty-one students gave six types of statements showing their understanding of the placement process mechanisms. The categories range from students who have a very specific conceptualization of how they were placed in resource programming to those students who don't have any idea of how placement occurred (see Table 3).

Table 3--Student's Understanding of the Placement Process (N-41)

1. Students citing specific placement mechanisms and decision-makers----------15
2. Students citing general academic reasons and decision-makers----------7
3. Students citing general social-emotional reasons and decision-makers----------1
4. Students citing specific mechanisms, but not decision-makers----------2
5. Students citing decision-makers, but not placement mechanisms----------10
6. Students citing neither specific mechanisms or decision-makers----------6

The first category is comprised of those students who provided an account of both specific placement procedures and specific people who made the actual placement decisions. The second and third categories are those responses which described placement occurring for general adademic or social-emotional reasons and which named specific placement decision-makers. Students in the fourth category described a specific placement procedure (ie. a test) which they believe led to placement, but could not name adults involved in their placement decision. Fifth category students named the decision-makers, but not the actual placement procedures. Students in the last category did not know either the mechanisms or the decision-makers.

The distribution of decision-makers named by students is diverse. Most students initially said that an omnipresent

"they were responsible for the decision (ie. "They thought that I had a problem and sent me to resource.") Decision-makers named were: regular teachers (selected by 18 students); resource teachers (7); student's former teachers (3); a "special" teacher (1); counselors (7); a student's former counselor (1); psychologist (1); psychiatrist (1); "man who gives tests" (2); "lady who gives tests" (1); social worker (1); vice-principal (1); principal (6); superintendent (1); "a committee" (ie. the "Board of Handicaps") (3); school board (1); the "school" (1); parents (10); mother (12); father (2); neighbor (1); friend of family (1); Salvation Army Big Brother (1); and "me" (1).

Category 1 statements (from Table 3) represent the most detailed accounts of how placement occurred and by whom decisions were made. All 15 statements refer to some form of testing of the student which is then analyzed by a decision-maker as a basis for placement.

> "Well, a man gave me a puzzle to do. Only five minutes and I did about half. There wasn't time to do it. I just laughed at him. He tested me and said I had problems and had to go to the resource room....And that's how I got here--because of that puzzle."
>
> .....
>
> "I had to do a test. It was remembering numbers backwards. This man--I think he was a psychologist or somebody--gave me some numbers to say backwards and I couldn't remember more than five numbers....This man would say like 1,2,4,3, 5,6,4. Then he would ask me to say them backwards in that order. I couldn't say 6 numbers backwards. That's why they

thought that I would need some extra resource help....
There is a school committee that the principal is on...There are counselors and teachers on it also. They decided that if a kid is slow on something, then he must go to resource"

The Category 2 and 3 statments do not mention testing. Instead, there is reference to general academic or social-emotional needs which sets in motion the placement process.

"We had this neighbor lady who was worried about my reading problems. She said that my mom and I should go and complain that the school should put me in the resource room so that I wouldn't be such a bad reader. In the sixth grade, they put me in it."

.....

"The things at the [group] home that they say are secret--the things that they say they won't let outside--always end up in school....Anyways, the school knows a lot about me and decided that I should be in resource."

The lack of preciseness becomes more evident in Category 4.

"I was tested by this lady. She suggested [resource] to my mom....That's why they put me into resource. The lady said that it was my comprehension that wasn't very good. What is [comprehension]?"

The ten Category 5 students described placement decision-makers, but could not describe the placement process itself. Ninth-grader Walt said his placement--initiated by the "school board"--was "out of the clear and then ZAP! Here I was!" Others presented their entry into resource programs as resulting from unexplained scheduling directives.

"I don't know [how the process works]. They didn't say anything to me. I just came to school and then they told me I was in resource after I started school....They just said, 'You, you go down there and start.' That is how it all happened."

.....

"Got me. I don't know [how the process works]. All I know is that someone called my mom and said here I was. And I started coming.....They probably thought that they better get a place ready for this kid with problems. Maybe the counselors talk too. I don't know. Do you know?"

Students in the final category knew very little about why or how they were placed in a resource program. Many guessed when asked about their placement process.

"I don't know! How am I supposed to know. They just decide [where to place students]. They don't ask me."

.....

"Don't ask me! In the fourth grade, they just said, 'You're going to resource.' This lady came into my class and just told me about my new class. I don't even know who she was. They just said that I had to go to resource."

B) Thoughts about Teachers. Thirty-two students discussed feelings towards their resource teachers. Only one student gave ambivalent feedback about a resource teacher, while the other 31 provided positive feedback about one or more aspects of their teacher (see Table 4).

The most striking aspect of this data was the repeated assertion that resource teachers helped students with their

personal problems. Students described their relationships as being "more personal" than they experienced with their other teachers. Steven said, "I like Mrs. Clancy. She is always there for me....I know that I need someone to talk to about things and I can do it right there."

Table 4--Characterizations of resource teachers (N-32)

They help with personal problems	21
They help with school concerns, problems	13
They "don't yell" at students	7
They "know you better" than regular teachers	6
They're "good teachers," "nice to you," etc.	8
They "work you hard"	3
"You get in trouble with them"	1

Students talked to their teachers about a range of personal problems. Donald said, "They help you with things that don't even happen in school. Like if you can't talk to anybody else about something, Ms. Billott is right there for you." And seventh-grader Karen said, "Like if you have a problem with some kids or something or if you have a problem with your mom, you can talk to them and they help you figure out what you can do. They really care about you."

Students said that this relationship existed because these resource teachers "knew them better" than did their regular teachers. James: "They know you better than most of the regular teachers do. They don't have so many kids they have to know." Students cited the lower student:adult ratios

(allowing for help from assistant teachers and graduate interns) of 3:1 or 2:1. Wendy: "There aren't as many kids here so that they have the time."

Another catalyst for the more personal relationship is that resource programs addressed both the affective and cognitive needs of pupils. Students repeatedly praised this balanced program orientation--regardless of whether they viewed their own placement as having occurred for academic or social-emotional reasons. Willy: "We talk about things a lot--how to behave. We talk about how to choose to act right and what decisions to make. Even tough things sometimes like talking to girls--you know, how to do it."

A tone is established in which teachers are accepting of student's personal needs. Carl said: "The [resource teachers] don't yell at you if you make a mistake in here. They are patient with you." George explained the difference between his regular teacher and John, his resource teacher. "John's much different. The man never yells at anything. There's a problem, see, and he talks to you about it. Tries to work things out. He doesn't blow up and get weird."

C) Interpersonal Problems. The vast majority of interviewed students encountered the stigma of being a special class student. Goffman[13] states that stigma results from a socially perceived attribute which discredits or taints oneself in the view of peers. The attribute in this case is resource placement.

Forty-one students talked about interpersonal problems (see Table 5). Of these, 38 described problems resulting from that stigma. The problems included: being teased or physically abused by peers; disliking a public association with other

special needs students or a special education classroom; feeling embarrassed; and losing friends.

Table 5--Interpersonal problems (N-41)

Students reporting interpersonal problems resulting from placement	38
a) students teased; thinking they will be teased; or physically-abused by non-resource peers	34
b) students disliking being in a room known by non-resource peers to be a resource room	7
c) students disliking public association with other special needs students	5
d) students losing friends because of placement	2
e) students specifically referring to "embarrassment" as a result of placement	3
Students disliking being in program away from their preferred classmates	7
Students not teased	3
Students not responding	3

Resource students treated as a matter-of-fact that non-resource peers viewed resource rooms as places where academically or behaviorally-deficient students are served. Pamela said that non-resource peers think resource is "a class for problem people--you know, slow kids, trouble kids, kids that fight." Jason's response is similar" "They think you're stupid if you come here. They think that if you have a weakness, you are stupid."

Thirty-four students encountered this attitude in comments

or actions of non-resource peers. This was most frequently expressed in teasing incidents. Regardless of a student's particular label, he or she was often viewed as "retarded" or as a "retard." Other variations were "slow, stupid, or dumb." Jenny: "They call you a 'retard' if you go to resource." Ben: "You get hassled by some other kids for being 'slow' or being a 'retard' when you are in a resource room." And Louis: "They say things to you like 'YOU'RE going to resource? Only retarded kids go there. You must be retarded.' " Resource students often lost debates or arguments because "retards don't know what they're talking about."

The stigma was heightened by two public associations--one with other students known to have special needs and one with a room location known to be a special education room. Students said that being visibly congregated with other resource students made their status more noticeable. George: "There is also this reputation about the place--about the 'retards' in it....I guess they see some of the [resource] kids. One of the kids drools and people think 'What kind of crazies go there?' " And Anita: "The other kids see it and they think you in a crazy room--like you mentally retarded." The same dynamic occurs from being in a certain physical location.

> "People sort of talk about classes and stuff. So someone says, 'Hey, where do you go now?' And I say, '7A.' They think that's the retard class. As soon as they know its 7A, they know that you're a 'retard! Even if you're not one."

The negative interactions involve more than just verbal taunts directed at student's resource status. Walt reported being periodically "slapped in the face;" Jenny described being

kicked, hit, yelled at, and having her watch broken; and John described an on-going series of physical abuse aimed at a girl in his resource class. Two students reported that on-going friendships had been disrupted by the resource placement: "I lost a lot of my friends because of resource programs. They start calling you things.... Sometimes you just can't keep someone for a friend when they say those things." Students believed that the teasing was of a different nature and in excess of the bantering typically associated with upper-elementary and junior high school students.

The continual reinforcement comes, on occasion, from more than just students. Anna said: "One day, they [announced over the public address system], 'All you handicapped kids in Mr. Levin's class get ready for bowling.' They said it out loud. I got real mad." Resource placement--for all its benefits--is a source of stigma to students.

D) Coping Strategies. To handle the stigma of resource placement, students developed a number of strategies. In the case of the public address announcement, Anna went to the counselor's office to confront the announcer about his lack of sensitivity. When confronted by teasing or abuse, most students choose less-direct coping strategies. Some students adopted consistent strategies (ie. always ignoring the provocation), while others were eclectic (ie. ignoring, threatening, seeking help from a teacher). Most students used more than one coping strategy (see Table 6).

Ignoring was the preferred tactic. Some chose to ignore taunts because it was the most effective strategy: "I just don't talk to them at all. Soon they stops their fuss and talk.

I don't pay no mind." Others pessimistically ignore the taunts because they saw no other options available to them: "Mostly, I try to ignore. I hear them, but I don't say anything. What can you say to the teasers? You can't win....I can't beat them." And some students ignored the remarks so as to avoid trouble:

> "I just listen. See, its not that I'm scared or anything to fight back. I just don't want to get in trouble for fighting. So I don't do anything. You learn to avoid it whenever you have to."

Table 6--Coping strategies (N-31)

Ignoring remarks of provocation	24
Verbally countering the remarks	7
Suggesting less-stigmatizing name for resource room	6
Seeking help from teacher	6
Threatening student who teases	5
Replying in constructive way to teasing student	5
Keeping resource placement a secret from peers	4
Feeling "sorry for" or trying to understand motivation of teasing student	2
Talking about teasing with resource peers	2
Talking about teasing with family members	1
Fighting with students who tease	1
Keeping angry feelings to self	1

Some students were selective in choosing who they told about their resource placement. Several tried to prevent anticipated teasing by keeping their resource status a secret.

Donald: "I don't tell [my friends] anything about [resource].... I don't really want them to know about it--its sort of embarrassing." Larry: "My friends don't know anything. I'm ashamed to tell people about it." Others engage in "instrumental telling"[11]--revealing their status only to close friends who they believe will not abuse the privileged information. Anita, for example, ignored taunts "except when its your friends and then you can tell them what the real story is."

Some students tried to handle teasing in ways they viewed as socially constructive. Two responded matter-of-factly by explaining the exact nature of their learning problems to those who teased so that other students would not confuse their specific learning needs with more global problems (ie. "retarded"). Others sought support from teachers, family members, and other resource peers. The tactic suggested most frequently by those offering support was to "ignore the comments."

There were times when "constructive" strategies were not adequate and students chose to argue with or threaten teasing students. Arguing or threatening was viewed as being effective only in certain situations. Pamela said, "I don't take that [teasing] from nobody! They know they better not say that to me." But students also indicated that it had the potential to backfire.

> "You can get in trouble easily. I mean that kids are watched. Even in this room, kids are here because they have problems with fighting or being slow in things. You can't get into more trouble--otherwise the school will deal with you. You can't get angry about things. If trouble comes walking down the hall, then I go the other way. I've learned to control it."

One female student was unable to select any of the above tactics. She kept her feelings within and vented her frustration in other directions.

"My old school had some metal cabinets that I would go in and hit sometimes. I can get pretty angry when I feel like it. I'd go in and hit those cabinets. Then I'd feel better.... I just keep it real quiet inside of me....I just get so angry. I walk around and want to punch someone. I wish I could punch them. But I don't do it. Instead, I walk in here and I keep quiet. But what I think is that I wish I could punch a hole in the wall. It's just terrible what the kids say. I say to not tease me, but sometimes I can't stop them.... I just get really tired of the whole thing. Sometimes its almost like I want to kill those kids who make it hard."

Finally, six students--from different programs--suggested that by changing the name of their resource room to a less-stigmatizing name (ie. "study hall"), much of the teasing would be prevented. Harold: "Lots of kids go to study hall and noone laughs [at them]. Resource has a bad name with some kids. That's why I'd change the name." Students in two programs actually voted to change the name of the room to a "lab" because "everyone goes to the lab."

Students were seldom satisfied with the effectiveness of their coping tactics. Whichever strategies they chose, they faced continued teasing.

E) Thoughts about Resource Programs. Despite the commonly-experienced interpersonal problems, most students held strongly favorable views about their resource program. Forty-two noted

whether they liked, disliked, or had neutral/ambivalent feelings about their programs (see Table 7). Sixteen students had strongly favorable views. Students cited the special assistance, small class ratios, empathetic relationships with teachers, the opportunity to prepare assignments for other courses, and the curriculum focus on both academic and social-emotional needs as factors in that choice. Several selected it as their favorite class. Another 14 said they "liked"--with some reservation--their programs. These students often felt as though they were expected to do "too much work" in the resource room. Those students not liking the programs mentioned "boredom" as their primary reason. They did not criticize resource programs in general--rather, they criticized their individual placement within those programs, while believing it to be an appropriate setting for other students.

Table 7--Opinions about resource rooms (N-42)

Strongly favorable	16
Favorable	14
Neutral/ambivalent	7
Unfavorable	1
Strongly unfavorable	4

A second set of statements provided another form of feedback about the programs. Thirty-five students talked about the overall utility that resource programming had for their own needs or the ways in which they saw themselves changing as a result of the placement (see Table 8). Redl[20] has written that change or "improvement" is a difficult concept for a

therapist or teacher to define. It is equally difficult for a student to define. Some students discussed changes in their own self-image. Others focused on a particular area of remediation (ie. "I read better now.") Of the 35 students addressing the issue, 31 described themselves as having experienced "positive" changes.

Table 8--Overall utility of program (N-35)

Students experiencing positive changes	31
a) academic change	23
b) social-emotional change	4
c) general, unspecified change	4
Students unsure if they have changed	3
Student not experiencing change	1

Most students discussed academic gains in terms of "catching up" or maintaining pace with their non-resource peers. Jeffrey said, "The thing is that if you work hard enough here, then you can even catch up." Reading is mentioned most frequently as the academic area in which change is noted. Louis: "I read better now than I used to." Kristin: "Now I'm getting better and I like reading. I get help for reading in here." Four students noted similar change in their social-emotional needs. Anita: "I used to get angry all the time....I still get angry, but now I sort of know when its happening and I just leave the room." And Adam: "Yeah, I've changed. I used to go about a 100 miles an hour all the time. Now I think about things. I don't get in trouble so much."

For many students, advancement in one skill area meant a general improvement in self-concept. Desmond: "When I first started coming, I thought I was stupid....But now I know that its different....All I know is that [resource] is really helping me to read like the other kids. I'm not as disabled as when I came into the room." And Nick noted, "I used to think I was stupid. But not anymore. What I need help in is reading, but that don't make me stupid."

F) The Future. Twenty-five students talked about their potential need for special education programming in the future. Although 31 of 35 students said they were experiencing positive changes from resource programming, 18 of 25 students were uncertain if they would require resource placement in the future. Only four students predicted that they could "make it" without resource assistance. One believed he would remain in resource indefinitely.

The 18 students declared that future educational placement "depends" on their present work. Wendy: "[Resource placement next year] all depends on how I do this year." Unlike previous research[8] in which mildly handicapped students indicated a disbelief in their own self-efficacy, these students accept--at least partially--an internal locus of control over their future. If they "do good work," they see themselves being mainstreamed.

Summary and Implications

This study summarized the views of 44 students about their resource programs. Resource placement had an impact on these student's self-concept as is seen in their attributing learning

or behavioral deficits to themselves when asked why they are in resource programs. While a few students described their placement process with some degree of accuracy, the vast majority exhibited confusion and an inaccurate understanding of their reasons for placement, the actual placement procedures, and of the decision-makers behind the placement. Most believe they exerted little influence over the initial decision-making involved in their placement.

Resource programs place students in difficult circumstances. They are separated from their friends to attend resource programs. They experience the pain of being placed in a room for students with "problems." They are called "retard," "dumb," "slow," and "wacko." To counter the taunts, most interviewed students develop coping strategies. Some are viewed as socially-appropriate--ignoring the taunts; matter-of-factly responding; soliciting help from peers or a teacher. Other tactics are more problematic--holding anger within; threatening students; keeping one's school program a secret from peers. Whatever the tactic, though, the teasing continues.

Despite interpersonal problems, students rate their resource programs very favorably. Small classes and a flexible curriculum are two reasons. A third is the supportive relationships which many students develop with their teachers. The resource room is viewed as a setting where all their needs--including those coming from home--will be accorded attention. Students also believe the programs have an overall positive utility for them as evidenced by their perceived growth in specific skill areas and general self-concept. The bottom line for these students is a desire to be placed in normalized

programming. They believe that the programs--coupled with their own effort--can be a force promoting their fuller integration.

Those who work with students will not find these conclusions surprising. The only difference is that here we are being told these things by students rather than positing them for ourselves. They tell us that we must be attentive to their total needs and not just their academic needs. Unfortunately, special education programs for mildly-handicapped students often focus on remediation of academic concerns while neglecting social-emotional concerns.

Programs must focus on student's social-emotional needs. Curriculum units must be developed on how to respond--in both socially-constructive and personnally-satisfying ways--to teasing and taunting. Programming must also be directed at regular education teachers and non-resource students to sensitize them to the social needs of resource students.

Lastly, resource students should be made a part of their referral, placement, and planning process. They are presently included in the process "when appropriate." In practice, though, they seldom participate--and therefore usually fail to understand--why they are placed in special education programs. Recent data has revealed that only a small percentage of students are actually involved in developing their own Individual Education Programs (IEP)--even when those students are in the 16 to 21 year-old age bracket. The proportion of students who even discuss their IEP with a school representative is also small.[26] This lack of understanding allows students to mystify their own "deficits" while remaining needlessly vulnerable to the negative stereotyping of non-

resource peers. Salvia and Ysseldyke[23] write that "children have the right to know whatever the school knows about their abilities, performance, and problems." That knowledge would help to minimize the negative aspects and accentuate the positive aspects of resource programming.

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